

If Some Christmas Traditions Have a Pagan Origin, Is It Right for a Christian to Celebrate Christmas?

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The debate over whether Christians can be celebrated by Christians or not has been going on for centuries. It is important to note, however, that there have been genuine Christians on both sides of the issue. There are also good reasons for each part of the debate: On the one hand, the pagan origin of the rituals performed at Christmas and the fact that December 25 may not even be the exact date of Christ's birth hinder Some Christians in observing Christmas. On the other hand, their counterparts assert that meaning of any word, symbol or custom is determined by current usage and not by its origin, so the practices have moved away from their origins and no longer mean anything they used to mean in the pagan rituals. Regardless of either view, the Bible's guidance should authoritatively prevail over all opinions.

The Bible does not give us the date of Jesus' birth or require us to observe it. Before we can examine the biblical advice on this subject, it is important to understand the origin of the December 25 celebration. In fact, the celebration of Christmas (the Mass of Christ) began in the early 4th century in remembrance of the birth of Christ. Before this period, the Romans had a culture of celebrating the festival of Saturnalia from December 17th to 24th in honor of the god *Saturn* and on December 25, they celebrated *Sol Invictus* (or *Unconquered Sun*) associated with the winter solstice. When Christianity became the state religion in the fourth century, the Roman Empire converted the two holidays into a single Christian holiday called the Feast of the Nativity, celebrated on December 25, in commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It was indeed a step from paganism to Christianity. Since then, Christians have adopted this date as the date of Christmas. However, some of the customs and debauchery associated with Saturnalia were cleaned up while others were incorporated into the celebration of Christmas.

Some of the elements of paganism absorbed in Christmas celebration include but are not limited to the use of bells, candles, holly, and yule decollations of which Christians have changed the meaning. For example, bells are played to announce the joyful news, candles are lit to remind Christians that Christ is the light of the world ([John 1:4-9](#)), a star is placed on top of a Christmas tree to remember the Star of Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:9](#)), and gifts are exchanged to remind Christians of the Magi's gifts to Jesus Christ ([Matthew 2:11](#)) who is God's greatest gift to humanity ([John 3:16](#)). The question is whether Christians should link their Christmas celebration to pagan rituals.

First, the Bible does not mandate Christians to celebrate the birth of Christ and does not even provide the date of His birth. If God had deemed it important that we know the exact date of our Savior's birth for regular celebration, He would certainly have told us in His Word. However, the Scriptures have no objection to celebrating it. In other words, those who choose to celebrate Christmas do so of their own choosing and they do no wrong, if they genuinely do it for the Lord's glory. Although not written about Christmas, Apostle Paul's exhortation seems to apply: "One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind" ([Romans 14:5](#)). Whatever choice we make regarding Christmas celebration, our views should not be used to tear down or denigrate those with opposing views, nor should they be used as a pride-inducing badge of honor to celebrate or not to celebrate. However, if there are unbiblical practices in our Christmas celebration, then those should be forsaken.

A potential risk faced by Christians is loving celebratory rituals over God, i.e. focusing on the physical rather than the spiritual side of things. When this is the case, Christmas rituals and decollating objects tend to become idols ([Isaiah 44:9-18](#); [Jeremiah 10:1-16](#)).

In all, December 25 may not be even close to the time Jesus was born, but celebrating Christmas is a matter of conscience. However, some Christmas traditions undoubtedly do have their origins in the pagan past. If you are fully convinced that you cannot, in good conscience, observe a particular Christmas tradition, do not observe it.

At the same time, if you are fully convinced that you can honor and worship God through a particular tradition,

honor and worship God ([Romans 14:5](#))! However, those who celebrate should be wise to discern and seek

wisdom from Him who gives it liberally to all who ask ([James 1:5](#)) and accept one another in Christian love and

grace, regardless of our views on Christmas. Our hearts should not be drawn to the early pagan rituals or to

seeking outward pleasure rather than rejoicing in our Savior. Even if the date is completely wrong, it is still

possible to take advantage of the opportunity and preach the Gospel of Christ to thousands of people who

would not attend church at other times of the year.

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